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By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

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Difficile eſt Satiram non ſcribere. JUV.

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

SIR,

IT has always appeared to me that there is ſomething extremely abſurd in a general ſatire: for as it will always inſtruct vanity how to ſhun, and enable impudence to reject it's application, I cannot diſcover that it is likely to anſwer any better purpoſe, than that of giving encouragement to rogues, and adminiſtering comfort to fools.

THIS

This ſpecies of writing is by no means of modern invention, and conſequently can have no eſſential connexion with the reigning manners of the preſent times. If we examine the ſatiriſts of any other age, we ſhall find that they have all unanimouſly followed the example of their father Simonides, and repreſented the human ſpecies in a very unnatural light; nor do I think it poſſible for any one to diſplay his talents this way, without having recourſe to the ſame expedient. From hence I would infer, that the deſcription of a monſtrous character, in thoſe early days of ſimplicity and innocence, was conſidered only as an ingenious piece of invention, and that their falſe notion of wit was the ſole occaſion of their giving into ſuch a ridiculous cuſtom. And this, as I take it, will be ſufficient to account for it's being ſo faſhionable with us at this time, though there be manifeſtly no other reaſon for our admitting it, than becauſe we are pleaſed to fancy the judgment of the ancients, and love to copy indiſcriminately from all their models with a ſervile veneration. But ſuppoſing this to be a true repreſentation of the caſe before us, and that men of wit never ſatirize with any offenſive deſign, but purely for the ſake of diſplaying their abilities; yet what ſhall we ſay for thoſe churliſh malecontents, who pretend to write ſatire, with no other earthly talent for it than rank malevolence? Why truly, it is to be feared, they have no leſs exaſperating a reaſon for reviling all mankind, than becauſe they are deſervedly deſpiſed by everybody that knows them. For as it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that a man, who has always been very civily treated by the world, ſhould have any inclination to fall out with it in good earneſt, ſo every worthleſs fellow who has been juſtly mortified by it's

contempt

contempt or averſion, will naturally be provoked to expoſe himſelf to it's utmoſt deriſion, by a ſilly attempt to retaliate the inſult. And hence it is, that if a few ſplenetic conceited wretches are not careſſed up to the extravagant expectation of their own imaginary deſerts, they ſhall immediately vent their reſentment in all thoſe alarming exclamations, that have, with equal propriety, been echoed through every century of the world. Then forſooth, that utter neglect of merit, which has been the conſtant reproach of every other age, ſhall once more be the peculiar infamy of this; then we ſhall be ſunk again into the very dregs of time, and ſhall at length be moſt aſſuredly filling up that aſtoniſhing meaſure of iniquity, which has been juſt on the very brink of being completed, ever ſince the firſt judicial infliction of an univerſal deluge.

It is very remarkable that this whim of degeneracy has always been moſt prevalent in the moſt refined and enlightened ages, and that it has conſtantly encreaſed in exact proportion with the progreſs of arts and ſciences. Every conſiderate perſon therefore, upon ſuch a diſcovery, will of courſe be enclined to conſider all invectives againſt the corruption of the preſent times, as ſo many convincing teſtimonies of our real improvement. I find, Mr. Fitz-Adam, it is your opinion that the experience of our anceſtors has not been entirely thrown away upon us, and that the world is likely to grow better and wiſer the longer it laſts. I muſt own I am entirely of your way of thinking, and ſhould be very ready to declare, was I not afraid of offending your modeſty, how much benefit it is likely to receive from your weekly inſtructions.

To

To thoſe who are ſequeſtered from the more crowded ſcenes of life, and muſt therefore find themſelves foreſtalled almoſt on every ſubject, but ſuch as the private fund of their own imaginations can furniſh them with; to thoſe, I ſay, it may ſeem very ſurpriſing that you ſhould be able to procure ſo many freſh materials for the gratification of their curioſity. But the fancy of the polite multitude is inexhauſtibly fertile; and they who are converſant with it at this time, will be ſo far from imagining that you are diſtreſſed for want of novelty, that they will rather think it impoſſible for the nimbleſt pen to keep pace with it's innovations. The only thing that can give them any ſurpriſe is, that you ſhould ſtill be catching at every recent folly that comes in your way, when they can ſupply you with ſuch a plentiful crop of new and unheard-of virtues. I am aware that new virtues will ſound a little odd to ſome preciſe formal creatures, who have conceived a ſtrange notion that all the virtues muſt eternally and invariably reſult from ſome certain unintelligible principles, which are called the relations and fitneſſes of things. But ſurely no man in his ſenſes would ever refuſe to vary the faſhion of his morals, if the taſte of the times required it: for it would be abſurd to the laſt degree, to ſuppoſe that it is not altogether as reaſonable to dreſs out our manners to the beſt advantage, as to wear any external ornament for the recommendation of our perſons; and not only becauſe the common practice of the world will juſtify our uſing as much art in managing the former as the latter, but becauſe it is difficult to conceive that there ſhould be any more eſſential harm in new modelling a habit of the mind, than in altering the trim of a coat or waiſtcoat.

And really it is aſtoniſhing to think what an advantage our preſent improved ſtate of morality has over all the ancient ſyſtems of virtue. If barely to avoid vice has been generally reckoned the beginning of virtue, to convert vice itſelf into virtue, muſt needs border very nearly on the very perfection of merit. And can any one pretend to deny but that many practices, which in times paſt were branded with infamy, have at length, by our ingenious contrivances, been transformed into the moſt reputable accompliſhments? A great wit of the laſt age having aſked, by way of a problem, why it was much more difficult to ſay any thing new in a panegyric than in a ſatire, endeavoured to account for it himſelf, by obſerving that all the virtues of mankind were to be counted upon a few fingers, whereas their vices were innumerable, and time was hourly adding to the heap. But a late moraliſt has been ſo obliging as to make a great diminution in the number of our vices, and withal ſo ingenious, as to inliſt the greateſt part of them into the catalogue of virtues; ſo that at preſent a copious lampoon ought to be looked upon as a work of amazing invention, and a trite or barren dedication as the effect only of dulneſs. I will not pretend to prophecy to what an eminent degree of perfection this double advantage muſt in time advance us. It is certain that we have at preſent but few vices left for us to encounter with; and as I have reaſon to believe, that it is their names chiefly which make them formidable, I think it would be very prudent firſt of all to give their characters a little ſoftening; for could we but once bring ourſelves to look upon them with indifference, I make no doubt but we ſhould ſoon be able, either to extirpate them entirely, or, at leaſt, to gain them over with the reſt of their party to the ſide of virtue.

Some